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CHAPTER IV

THE PRACTICE OF AGRICULTURE

The barriofolk of Caticugan are subsistence farmers.[1] Most of their fields are so small that they might be better called gardeners. Yet their relationship with the land is not as intensely intimate as that of the Chinese or Japanese farmer. If the man-land relationship in China, for example, may be roughly characterized as a grim battle with an ever-constant threat of famine, the relationship in Caticugan is a persistent yet more amiable struggle. The careful hand-tillage and the planting of every tiny plot of land, as in most parts of China or Japan, does not occur in Caticugan. The pressure of the people on the land in Caticugan is less severe than in other parts of Asia or the Philippines.

This chapter describes and analyzes the agricultural practices and associated practices of Caticugan barriofolk. If any one chapter in this report highlights the general contours of living in Caticugan it is this. For, in many ways, the agricultural practices of the barriofolk embody the general ethos of their culture.

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[1] Caticugan includes Sitios Naga, Dangola and Talo-ot; when reference is made to Barrio Caticugan it does not include these three sitios, only the barrio proper as the people call it.

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Their fields are plots once cultivated by their ancestors; it is their meager inheritance of security that they will transfer to their children. The staple--corn--that keeps them alive comes mainly from their land. Their agricultural practices are interwoven with rituals that reflect their concept of the supernatural. For the barriofolk of Caticugan their fields are their life; and most of their lives are spent plowing, harrowing, planting and harvesting their crops.

HISTORICAL SUMMARY OF PHILIPPINE AGRICULTURAL LAND USE

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The history of agricultural ~~land~~ use in the Philippines is that of five major agricultural systems.[2] These systems are: (1) intensive highland irrigated terraces; (2) lowland intensive agriculture; (3) kaingin; (4) plantations; and (5) commercial mechanized agriculture. The evolution of the last two types of agricultural systems in the Philippines is easier to trace that that of the first three types, which developed during prehistoric eras. Preceding these five systems of land use were pre-Neolithic hunting and foodgathering but "their impact upon the environment was minor and temporary."[3]

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[2]The material on the development of agricultural land use patterns in the Philippines is summarized from Spencer, op. cit., pp. 4-12.

[3]Spencer, op. cit., p. 3.

Many people of Caticugan continue the corn harvest ceremony of their pre-Spanish ancestors but perform it within the privacy of the family group. I know of families in Caticugan who absolutely denied holding a dulot yet whose neighbors said they did. In the northern barrios there was no embarrassment in discussing the dulot. It was a barrio custom. In Caticugan many barriofolk recognized the dulot as a backward unchristian custom, yet they do not feel entirely secure in discarding it; to discard the dulot means to challenge their beliefs in encantos, kolisaos and katsos.

The decline of the dulot also reflects the growing individualism so noticeable in Caticugan. The group has been losing the firm control once held over the individual. This change is apparent in the role of the family in courting and marriage customs. The old cooperative labor groups have almost disappeared in Caticugan; with increasing population and subdivision of land through inheritance the fields are often so small that volunteer labor activities are less necessary today. It also has become cheaper to pay for help than to furnish workers with meals. Caticugan is en medias res of a gradual transition from a bartering to a money economy that stimulates the growth of individualism.

The population of Caticugan has expanded considerably over the years, but the yield of the fields appears to have decreased. The acreage yield of corn in the northern barrios is more than twice as large as in Caticugan. An

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527 443 ble in the local stores. There are rosaries, religious pictures, ice cream, novel candies, etc. This is the time when the girls and women from the *barrios* make great mounds of rice cakes and sell them at the local fiestas, adding the small profit to the family exchequer. Some of the women from Caticugan went as far away as the fiestas of Giliga-on and Bonawon to sell their food, *guhang* (a mildly alcoholic drink made from the fermented sap of the buri palm), and vegetables. They set up little "cafes" near the fiesta area where one might buy food or drink. Vendors from Dumaguete come to the *barrios*, and particularly the *poblacions*, with their merchandize, establishing their temporary stalls along the roads near the cockpit or gambling area. A lucky catch in a *bonsod* (fish coral) during a *poblacion* fiesta can bring the owner a small fortune overnight.

527 436 The circulation of currency in the *barrios* — where the barter system is still prominent — is at its height during the fiesta. The vendors and gamblers and other activities of the fiesta require money; one cannot barter for a place at the gambling table or for admission to the dance. This is when the bamboo banks are broken and the money used to purchase the necessary fiesta supplies. The fiesta is one of the relatively few occasions (others are weddings, funerals, etc.) when the barriofolk slaughter pigs, goats, cattle and even carabaos. The family "fiesta pig" is killed for *lechon*, having been fattening all year. There is more fish and fresh meat in the market places than at any other time of the year. Young people often go to the city to earn sufficient money to spend during fiesta. The fiesta has become a secular, in ways commercial, enterprise, which requires currency in order for one to participate in many activities. During most of the year, many of the barriofolk in Caticugan earn or spend little money; they barter their way from one need to another need.

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517 181 In summary, the *barrio* or *poblacion* fiesta complex has a variety of functions. *First*, the fiesta is the "big blow-out" of the year, anticipated by young and old for often different reasons. There is a singing gaiety in the air, a lightness of step, and a mood of relaxation in a fiesta-invaded locality. As the writer was once told at a fiesta: "This is the time when 'thanks' is redundant." Second, the fiesta affords many persons, particularly in the *poblacion*, an opportunity to validate their social position through a conspicious consumption of wealth, a lavish expression of hospitality. This association of hospitality with food may be traced back to the pre-Spanish culture of the Filipinos. Municipal and provincial officials, prominent visitors and other guests, are treated with extravagant courtesy and an overabundance of generosity. *Third*, the fiesta is an econo-

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574 181 Third, the fiesta is an economic investment. One's guests will, in the future, be one's hosts during their fiesta. In fact, this is one of several reasons given for organizing new *barrio* fiestas in southern Negros. The people felt ashamed to attend fiestas in neighboring communities without having a fiesta of their own when they could reciprocate enjoyed hospitality. In the long run, the bread thrown on the water returns. In some cases doubled. From this point of view the fiesta may not be as wasteful as many Filipinos believe.

796 181 *Fourth*, the fiesta serves a religious function, particularly in the *barrios* distant from the *poblacion* church. The fiesta is often the only time in the year the priest visits the local chapel and holds mass in the community for the barriofolk. Sometimes combining a baptismal or wedding celebration with the fiesta serves to reduce the family expenses by making a normal entertainment unnecessary by coordination with the fiesta. *Fifth*, the fiesta re-inforces the people's feeling of solidarity within the *barrio* or *poblacion*, although sometimes the event may enhance competitiveness between different communities. Most Filipinos take great pride in their *barrio* or *poblacion* fiesta. *Sixth*, the *barrio* and *poblacion* fiesta often reunite, for the only time of the year, members of the immediate families. The ideal pattern is for one always to return to one's home fiesta. It is not at all uncommon to meet relatives from Siquijor, Cebu, Panay, Leyte, or even more distant places, at Negros Oriental fiestas.

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796 794 181 *Seventh*, the fiesta furnishes the church with a sizeable annual income. The money collected for baptisms, masses, and the church's participation in the various religious activities of the fiestas is an important aspect of the financial support of the church by the people. The fiesta often renews the authority of the church in more isolated areas where this authority and responsibility lies dormant for most of the year. *Eight*, the fiesta in the larger *barrio* and *poblacion* is a commercial stimulant to the economic life of the community. Prices are often raised, purchases of food and clothing more frequent and larger than normal. The fiesta creates new wants and needs which do not exist during most of the year.

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436 181 *Ninth*, the fiesta is a means by which the indebtedness of many families is increased, by borrowing money to entertain their guests properly. Some families may mortgage their land for "agricultural" loans and others sell farmyard animals to raise a little cash for the fiesta. However, the waste may not be as great as imagined by many Filipinos. One's guests may next month be one's hosts. The fiesta also stimulates many people to work harder, and for others it is an oppotunity to augment the pitifully small family cash income by selling food and drink. *Tenth*, in the larger *barrio*

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Tenth, in the larger barrio

527 666 181 and *poblacion* the fiesta has a definite political function, especially in furnishing politicians with opportunities for making speeches, mending political "fences," and encouraging the officialdom of the local and provincial governments. *Eleventh*, the fiesta is one means of introducing into small *barrios* some of the techniques of democracy, of working together with one's neighbors in committees, and making a profit which is used to improve social or cultural conditions in the community. The printed fiesta programs have an educational function with their short, if not too critical, histories of the local region, listing all the provincial and municipal officials etc.

527 525 After *kahalogan* there may be a few dances, a "Barn Dance," a "Fashion Show," but the fiesta spirit is gone. The gambling activities may continue for several days after the end of the fiesta, but with less fervor. In the *barrios*, for the most part , the normal routine takes over after *kahalogan*. Lechon pits are filled. The bamboo arches slowly succumb to the elements or to fence-building scavengers. The professional gamblers depart with their tables and games for another fiesta. The gay window curtains, doilies, and tablecloths are packed away in the family trunk until next year. The *barrio* chapel decorations wilt and gather dust. For a while the barriofolk speak of *linas piyesta* ("after the fiesta") in dating events in time. Soon the fiesta becomes only a pleasant memory. Before this memory has faded completely, preparations are afoot for the next fiesta. [178] Nearly every *barrio* and *poblacion* has an innate consistent "strain" toward making the next fiesta "more modern," or "progressive." This may mean a better orchestra, maybe electric lights for the first time, a bigger beauty contest, a more important speaker, a printed instead of typed fiesta program, or a larger statue of their patron saint.

Few Americans who have attended a Philippine fiesta forget the gay event or the warm friendship and spontaneous hospitality of their hosts. It is the writer's hope that this tentative sketching of the rural Philippine fiesta complex may interest Filipinos in making a more detailed study of one of the unique aspects of their culture.[11]

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[11] The author would be most grateful for any critical comments on this article from Filipino readers of the *Silliman Journal*. All letters received will be carefully read and promptly answered.